

# Seattle Light Rail Review Panel

## Meeting Notes for May 17, 2000

### Agenda Items

- Review MLK Corridor Action
- Briefing on SoundTransit Public Art Program (continued)

### Commissioners Present

Jon Layzer, Chair  
Matthew Kitchen  
Carolyn Law  
Jay Lazerwitz  
Jack Mackie  
Paul Tomita

### Staff Present

Debora Ashland, Sound Transit  
Marty Curry, Planning Commission  
Barbara Goldstein, Arts Commission  
Lisa Merz, CityDesign  
Cheryl Sizov, LRRP

Jon Layzer chaired the meeting. The Link project as a whole was discussed and the fact that parts of it are starting to develop on different schedules. Although LRRP has concurred with Sound transit on many issues, there is concern that the messages from LRRP could get muddled in the translation. The idea of how LRRP communicates was discussed, with consensus that taking formal action on each item seen seems to be the most effective and clear method of communicating. Since there are many agencies involved, it is important that LRRP's position be clear. Jon expressed concern over how LRRP may be perceived. For example, when we become too critical, we may be viewed as not providing constructive feedback. Also, LRRP is not the client, and consequently, we may not see all the work being done by the consultants. Our comments are directed to Sound Transit for whom the consultants are working.

Paul Bay handed out a memo regarding the design work to date for the MLK Corridor. He is dissatisfied with the inadequate integration of design elements, and expressed the need for the community to be more involved and for Sound Transit to better articulate the design concepts, both graphically and in words. Paul is proposing a Task Force to develop some clear, alternative urban design/streetscape concepts that successfully integrate all the elements. The concepts must be presented in such a way that they can be taken out to the SE Seattle Community, for their constructive comments and ultimate support for a single unified concept. Several individuals have been identified to serve on the task force, including Cheryl Sizov representing CityDesign and LRRP. Sound Transit is currently reviewing resumes with the intent of hiring an additional urban designer who has experience with Light rail design on surface streets. Paul wants to start with the community and then bring concepts to the LRRP. The Task Force will have a base to start with and will address issues that LRRP has expressed concern over. These issues include appearance of the station and of the elevated structure, and coordination and integration of power poles. Safety will not be compromised. The lighting must be both functional and attractive. Consequently, Sound Transit will be taking a step back but not starting over. The goal is to have the neighborhood help develop the corridor so that they feel they have ownership over it and to ultimately create a stronger, more integrated design.

The Panel's draft action on the MLK Corridor was discussed. The Panel voted to amend the action to reflect Sound Transit's decision to create a Task Force, and to recommend one layperson on the task force to ensure that community needs are heard.

## Briefing on Sound Transit Public Art Program

Don Corson, Norie Sato, and Tad Savinar, START

The briefing began with proposed System wide elements. Several **triangular shaped properties** along MLK Jr. Way were identified as being possible future plazas. Here, streetside vignettes may be created to tell a story or relationship of the environment. Fourteen sites are currently identified. Each site will be looked at for potential partnership possibilities (including maintenance agreements). Community ownership and involvement is encouraged.

The next elements include **aerial guideways and retaining walls**. These will have a huge impact on the vertical landscape in the area. Maybe it will be linked to a marker or an OCS. The intent is to come up with a menu of options to enhance these aspects.

The **lighting of the Portage Bay Tunnel** is important since it is the only area where the rail will go underwater. It is a long tunnel so maybe there could be a marker that reflects the movement of the tunnel from under hills to under water. Images on the tunnel walls would probably not be visible due to the speed of the train. However, special lighting could convey entering a new zone and break up the monotony of the tunnel.

Design alternatives for the **Overhead Catenary System (OCS)** are still being explored. Since this will lend system wide identity, a broader look at what these may look like is necessary. This is in the formative stages of development.

The **tunnel portals** are a collaborative effort between engineers and architects to enhance the entrance to the tunnel sections. Some portals are more visible than others and the highly visible ones should have more money spent on them.

The **DJ link** concept would create an infrastructure where music or sounds could be heard at localized places in station waiting areas. It might be a three foot "music area" that would be consistent at every station, in essence linking the stations together aurally. This would be another opportunity for a different type of artist to participate. The sounds and music could change over time.

The **Alignment (Corridor) Works** are places in between stations. They could draw attention to transitions between the system and the neighborhoods.

The **maintenance facility** should be celebrated. Though it is not seen from I-5, it will be seen from the West Seattle Bridge. The 300 foot ramp could be designed as to celebrate the working of the yard. The lighting could be intensified to create a more vibrant presence. Since there will be already be over 150 poles in the yard, something could be done to enhance the features to create a more dynamic look.

**Station Directionality** could be done in several different ways. It may be difficult to understand which way the train is traveling so if all north poles where a particular color, or if south entrances were lighted with a certain color, this may help users keep focused on train directions.

**Landscaping** could be identifiable at each station. For example, a particular plant may be designated for each station.

The goal of the **Henderson Land Work** is to create a landscaped gateway by using the land around the Henderson station that becomes available through right of way acquisitions or partnerships with other organizations. The earthwork would bring a sense of cohesiveness and wonder to the station. This could be accomplished as long as maintenance and safety issues could be met.

The **Duwamish Crossing** could celebrate the train's crossing over the water. Perhaps something could be done in the theme of Native Americans or salmon and other wildlife to celebrate their areas past.

As the **train crosses over I-5**, aerial guideways could be used to hold some kind of artwork which could create a sense of entrance into the city.

The idea of incorporating a **History Project** into the overall project has been discussed. How can history and storytelling be combined into the system in order to narrate our area's past?

**Braid artwork** at each station would call attention to the connectivity of the system. This would be continuous artwork which maintains a theme or narrative throughout the system. It might be a lion which would take different forms at each station, something which connects the system together.

The **marker** would show the entrance to each station. The criteria established in the Urban Design Guidelines will be used and the marker will go through the internal SoundTransit design process. This marker would only be used for Light Rail and must be able to work with the station signage system.

The idea of an experience which **does not require vision** will be explored. Perhaps it can be something that the user touches or a particular space which in itself creates an experience.

**Temporary or changing artwork** could celebrate the construction of the system. The elements could change as the system becomes more complete. Children's artwork projects or community outreach projects could be included in this category.

**VAT** – the art program will be producing a 38.5% document which will be used to show the public what is being proposed. These ideas at a very conceptual level and the next level will include heavier community involvement.

## Discussion

- The presentation is well done and it is good to see things laid out, but is all this really possible ?
- The system wide landscaping should be done by SoundTransit rather than the arts program.
- Could the lighting come from the cars themselves, rather than the tunnel.
- Is there any way that the traveling of the train under Portage Bay could be shown aboveground so that people knew a train was traveling through the tunnel at that time?
- The portals are important from inside the train. How will the transition work for this?
- The idea of station directionality is a good way to link areas together. What about the possibility of northbound trees being of one variety and southbound trees of another.
- The DJ Link idea was praised. *(Not all aspects of this have been explored but it may be that a station could have a street performer or other type of artistic expression.)*
- We're concerned about integration and at what point all this starts to fit together.
- Since there is not enough money to cover the wish list, how will these be prioritized? Can art projects be combined to save money? Funds should be spent where they can add value in a measurable way. Focus on places that are highly visible.

- System wide elements will be particularly valuable in Rainier valley since it is so highly visible.
- System wide elements have a potential to make this extraordinary. This in itself would create Link's identity. As each station gets developed, it is hoped that system wide pieces don't get lost. *(The budget for station versus system wide art has been split down the middle.. System wide art takes more money than at an individual station. It is hoped that some of these things will happen through architectural design.)*
- Take the system wide elements to community and neighborhood groups. By pulling together users and talking with them about the experience of the ride, you can make a difference with what funding you have. Keep in mind how the commuter spends his time and design the interior accordingly. Every station does not necessarily need an individual piece of art.
- The OCS design is really important. The question of dividing up the funds before you actually know what the opportunities are was discussed. Can money be held back from individual stations and moved around as you need it? If expenditures are prioritized at each station, maybe this could help create contingency funds. *(Part of the problem with the budget is that SoundTransit needs the budget allocated as early as possible while at the same time, it is difficult for the Arts commission to know where the best uses will be until they see further designs.)*
- The installation artists can come on early while object-orientated artists can come on later.

Discussion concluded and the Panel moved to the following recommendation.

#### **Recommendation**

***The Seattle Light Rail Review Panel commends the SStart team for a thorough presentation and its expansive vision for what the art program might encompass. Accordingly, the Panel recommends approval of the 30% body of work as presented, and requests further development as follows:***

- ***Continue to focus on the experience of the Link user, in order to consider artwork from the perspective of a rider on the Link system—including both regular and intermittent passengers, since each type of user may suggest different approaches to specific artworks.***
- ***In addition, focus on where artwork can make a significant difference in the community—where it is visible, welcome, and able to leverage other improvements or foster other partnerships to create a larger impact.***
- ***Carefully examine the stations and system elements to determine priorities for available funding; reserving an additional increment for system-wide elements and revisiting the allocation for each station now and at 60% design. Continue to monitor architectural work to ensure placeholders for specific artworks as well as to influence the architectural design overall.***
- ***While earmarking funds for priority items, identify any design for artwork placement or artwork integration opportunities that could be lost if funding is not set aside now. At the same time, try to retain some flexibility to fill gaps or respond to opportunities that may arise as the architectural design work for each station evolves.***
- ***Discuss further how the system-wide and station-specific elements work together; with an emphasis on avoiding duplication of efforts and a "scattershot" approach to siting art.***
- ***Include the community in discussion of the system-wide concepts as well as the ideas for their particular station.***

***The Panel requests that the SStart team prepare a "38.5%" document that shows a consolidation of system-wide ideas and suggests the priorities for funding, as well as identifies critical dates in the process by which artist involvement must happen or be lost due to the architectural and engineering schedules. Also, the Panel urges Sound Transit to continue to make use of the SStart team for system-***

*wide elements, landscaping, and the “big moves” and—if needed—to create new mechanisms to help the design disciplines work together effectively and to prevent key art concepts from dropping out of consideration.*

The meeting adjourned at 6:15 pm.